

## Introduction

Health Education and Literacy Program (HELP) is a Community Service Learning project developed in 2012 at UT Health San Antonio to enhance the health education of residents at Providence Place, a non-profit organization in San Antonio, Texas. The Center for Higher Independence (CHI) Program, within Providence Place, affords young adults with disabilities the opportunity to learn skills needed to obtain employment and live independently. The HELP curriculum further supplements this program by focusing on hygiene skills, nutritional values, and the importance of exercise as essential parts of living an independent and healthy life. With many residents on the autism spectrum, the social rules and expectations associated with healthy behaviors are sometimes confusing and easily neglected.<sup>1</sup> The ultimate goal of HELP is to improve quality of life and promote heightened independence in the participants of this program by increasing their knowledge of health-related topics and their awareness of healthy lifestyle choices.

### Target Population:

- 40 students, both male and female, between the ages of 18 and 36
- Large percentage on the autism spectrum and/or hearing impaired
- 4 month long curriculum (roughly 20 lessons)



Two HELP participants making healthy Halloween snacks

## Methods

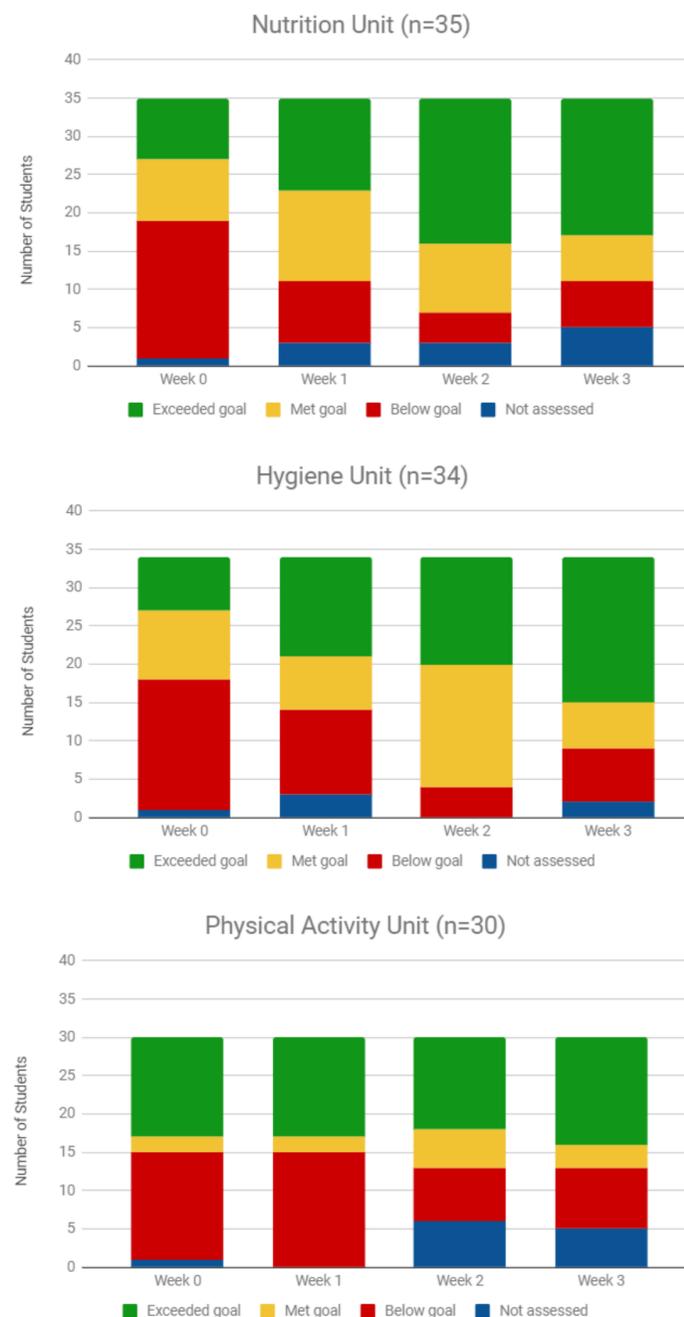
HELP consisted of bi-weekly 30-minute health-based lessons followed by 30 minutes of physical activity. The curriculum incorporated a variety of topics including nutrition, personal hygiene, physical fitness, and medical, dental, and sexual health. The efficacy of this curriculum was evaluated using a Goal Attainment Scale. At the beginning of each unit, each participant made a personal goal related to the present HELP topic (nutrition, hygiene, or physical activity). At that time, they also self-evaluated where they were in reaching that goal to establish a baseline (Week 0). Participants were reminded of their goals every lesson, and the concepts behind these goals were reinforced throughout the curriculum. At the beginning of each week, the participants evaluated themselves on how well they had achieved their goal throughout the past week.

## Results

Only students present for 3 or more weeks per unit were included in the results.

- Nutrition Unit: 69% of students met or exceeded their goal
- Hygiene Unit: 74% of students met or exceeded their goal
- Physical Activity Unit: 57% of students met or exceeded their goal

## Goal Attainment Outcomes



## Conclusion

Most of the participants had significant success with their nutrition and personal hygiene goals, but experienced less success with their physical exercise goals. Even though the participants demonstrated comprehension of the information, difficulty remains in successfully modifying behavior in such a short amount of time. Each participant's goal was highly individualistic in how they wanted to augment their everyday life. This autonomous approach promoted excitement and personalized participants' progress. The HELP curriculum, with emphasis placed on the development of and adherence to self-made goals, will motivate the participants to practice healthy habits not only now, but also well into the future.



Participants after receiving their certificates of completion at HELP Graduation

## Acknowledgements

- Charles Morris (Evening and Weekend Manager, Providence Place), for his continued assistance and support
- Melanie Stone, MPH, M.Ed. (Project Mentor, Director of Community Service Learning program at UTHSA), for her mentorship and guidance
- UT Health San Antonio, Center for Medical Humanities and Ethics (CMHE), for providing the Community Service Learning grant opportunity
- Baptist Health Foundation, for their generous grant support

## References

1. Wrobel, M. J., & Rielly, P. (2003). *Taking care of myself: a hygiene, puberty and personal curriculum for young people with autism*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, Inc.